During Project Teacher Interview

May 23, 2011

10:20 a.m.

Western Middle School Classroom

Me: Alright well are you ready?  
  
T: Yeah, I'm ready.  
  
Me: Describe to me what you think is going well in the project?  
  
T: Um, I think one of the things that is going really well is how engaged the kids are and how excited they are about picking their projects and, and, um choosing what they- how they want to present it and having so many options to choose from. That is what is the most.  
  
Me: Okay, yeah they do seem really excited about it, I have to agree.  Is that excitement, like, um, at the same level as when you do other kinds of things?  
  
T: Not exactly.  I think the difference is-they love doing anything hands-on, so when we have any kind of a lab or do anything hands-on, a guest speaker who is doing some kind of activity-they enjoy that.  I think with this one it's more- I think it has to do with that it is their choice and a lot of them really feel like they are making a difference which is- we’ve got one boy that if you would ask any of his teachers they would say, he doesn't do anything and yet he is over the moon doing this project. And you know, he has brought in barrels for recycling and made posters for me to laminate to put on the barrels.  He has pretty well worked it all out.  He is like, I know there are other groups doing it and I think I should talk to them and that we should work this out so that we are all doing something the same, you know, that the rest of the school is not confused and  
  
Me: Wow, that's nice.  
  
T: I say, this is you (laughter)?  Who hardly says two words and he hardly says two words most of the time.  
  
Me: Is he in one of the classes that I am watching?  
  
T: Yes.  
  
Me: Which one?  You need to point him out.  
  
T: He is either in the second class or he is in the third.  
  
Me: Cause a lot of kids are doing recycling, aren't they?  
  
T: Yeah.  
  
Me: Which is great though.  
  
T: And, and you gotta think about it, they are really excited about the idea that they can prove it is happening and your suggesting why and that somebody might  
  
Me: Yeah  
  
T: Listen to you, you know.  
  
Me: Yeah, yeah.   
  
T: I think it is a different level because when they, when they do something that I am assigning, even when it is in centers where they have some choice about where, about what they do, it's still not the same level of you know, I guess, excitement.  
  
Me: Mmhmm. Yeah. Mmhmm. What challenges are you, have you faced implementing the project?  
  
T: [Laughter] Um [long pause] I had a laundry list that I had to email to my tech, the technology coordinator this morning.  It's like all of the sudden; I don't know if it is like a Friday the 13th thing (laughter).  Um, you know, we have, they are technology related and  
  
Me: Okay  
  
T: Um, a lot of the things that are happening, um, you know, Andy came in the other day to do something for me and he said, “We’ll look, it's just this.” And I said, “I want you to know that I work really hard to troubleshoot these things [laughter].  I check the help box and I, you know, read up on these things before I call you.”  And he said, "I know, I know.  I was already in the building, it was an easy fix.” And uh, but there are so many things that I can't fix.  He has to come over or the assistant tech director has to come over.  And, and they are just not available to me [emphasized] at my beckon call as quickly as they possibly can, but  
  
Me: Sure  
  
T: You know, some days I would just like them to be sitting in the corner.  
  
Me: Right.  
  
T: You just sit right there until a problem comes up because I know one is gonna happen.  
  
Me: Uh huh, right.    
  
T: So it's been some of the technology stuff and part of it is, it's been, um, just the way our network works.  Part of it is, um, you know, me not having a technology background.  It literally is-  
  
Me: Yeah, that is a lot of technology to have without-  
  
T: Yeah, and you know, I have to do a lot of reading on my own, which is not a problem but the kids, they get to a place and they run into a problem and I can't solve it immediately and then they are stuck for the next ten minutes.  
  
Me: Right.  
  
 T: So, that’s, that's probably been the biggest challenge that there is not really anything we can really do about it except hire my own personal [laughter] [inaudible].  
  
Me: Do the technology people, do they know you were doing this project?  
  
T: Yeah.  
  
Me: Yeah, yeah.  Okay.  I was wondering about that. Does the project integrate science, technology, engineering and mathematics?  
  
T: Definitely science and technology.  
  
Me: Mmhmm.  
  
T: Um [pause] probably not- [pause]  
  
Me: It probably depends on the project too?  
  
T: Yes, yes, it really does.  I have one group that wants to, one of her ideas was they wanted to clean the pond and they were working out how to get-what machinary they were gonna get, so in some cases there might be some engineering.  Not as much math when I think about, you know, when I think about it off the top of my head.    
  
Me: What about in terms of economics, in finding out how much things costs?  
  
T: Yes, there is that, yeah and-  
  
Me: What they can afford and what they can't?  
  
T: Exactly. That sort of thing. Somebody went after today how much fertilizer.  I said you need to find that out, so, so-  
  
Me: Yeah.  
  
T: From that standpoint yeah there is some of that.  
  
Me: Okay, great.  Um, what impact are you seeing on your students?  Especially struggling learners?  
  
T: They are all engaged.  They are all involved in some way.  Um, they are all doing something.  In some cases it may just be offering an opinion or an idea but everybody has some part of it.  And I've never seen the kids work together as well as when they are working on that.  I mean we do groups-  
  
Me: Yeah, I have noticed that too.  
  
T: Now, you know, they did not pick their groups.  When I put the groups together, it was based on who applied for what job.  I did try to look at ability levels and personalities.  Um, I’ve only had one group where I have had somebody come and say, "so and so won't do anything at all,” and, and they were fighting about it.  And you know, otherwise-  
  
Me: That is pretty good (laughter).  
  
T: It really is.  When we do other group projects. It's like I am constantly putting out those fires. He won't let me do this; he won't let me do that.  
  
Me: Yeah.  
  
T: You know, I said I tell him someday, I feel like I am at home, with my own personal three children [laughter].  I have to break up these little, these little tiffs.  That has not happened. I, I, I have one, one episode and and that was it.  
  
Me: Do you think they're- do you think they're working out a lot of it by themselves?  
  
T: I think so.  I think what they have discovered is that everybody needs to be doing something and I think that they have worked really hard at making sure that everybody is doing something.  There is a lot of, I think they have found there is a lot, there are a lot of jobs and tasks to be done and they have done a great job delegating and I am not even sure that they have locked into these that started out with.  I am the manager, I am the technician.  I think that they kind of worked out between themselves, this needs to be done.  Why don't you two go do this and we’ll do this? And then we will come back.  It's been amazing.  
  
Me: Okay.  Good.  That's awesome.  Um, what, have you gotten any response; well, you kinda talked about the responses that you've gotten from your students about this thing.  Have you gotten any other responses from like parents, adminstrators or teachers about the project at all?  
  
T: Um, not parents.  I havent had any parents.  You know, I kinda would have expected maybe somebody to just say, and maybe the kids are just not telling their parents.  
  
Me: Right  
  
T: But, but I also I don't see parents a lot.  If they come into the building, it is usually just to pick up their child, so they are only at the office.  I don't have a lot of personal contact with parent.  All of my contact is usually email or phone calls.  So I, you know, I guess it is not that out there.  
  
Me: But they are not calling you and asking you questions about it or things like that?  
  
T: No, not at all, not at all.  And most, a majority of the work is being done here.  I do know some of the kids have gone home and done some things and um, um-   
  
Me: One boy asked you to take the camera home.  
  
T: Yes.  
  
Me: Did you let him take it home?  
  
T: Yes.  
  
Me: How did that work out?  
  
T: He brought it right back the next day in perfect shape [laughter]. And, um, so, yeah, so that was hard.  That was hard for me to let go.  
  
Me: One thing I really noticed is that they really seem to feel that the technology's is a little golden and they-  
  
T: Yeah.  
  
Me: Seem to treat it.  Do you feel the same way?  
  
T: They have done a good job with that.  Um, with our mobile cart, we have a cart that has 21 laptops on it and anytime that goes out to be used. Almost, something, something gets broken on it.  I think that is mischief and I think that they, for whatever reason.  I don't know why they don't that, but they respect this.    
  
Me: Well, maybe the purpose is different too?  
  
(Ask about purpose)  
  
T: Well.  That. And I don't know if it is because it is brand new or it is because of they are taking ownership of what they are doing and they feel like the backpacks belong to them and um, so-  I, I, the other teacher, you know, I have two special ed teachers that work with me on a daily basis and they have been extremely supportive.  
  
Me: Okay.  
  
T: And you know, we've, you know, that has been great because we have had to let me take a group in outside where then other teachers stay back and vice versa.  We switch roles sometimes.  Um, it's really freed me up to do things that I haven't otherwise been able to do because of supervision issues.  
  
Me: Right, uh huh.  
  
T: The other teachers on my team said, “you know if you need, they need time in class.”  
  
Me: Yeah, I noticed that a little bit.  Like people would be later and you would tell them to tell their teacher so and so, and your team members are okay with that?  
  
T: Absolutely.  They have been wonderful and they have, um, let me pull kids briefly from their classes.  You know like, I, I, hadn't pull one of the girls out and had an issue, a very specific issue and she needed to be logged in to show the technology person what the problem was and I needed her for five minutes.  “Come in, log on.  Let's show Mrs. H,” and you, know see what we can do about it and if they have free time in their other classes, they have been allowed to use the classroom computers-  
  
Me: Mmhmm.  
  
T: If they needed to, so it's been, yeah.  They have been very supportive.  
  
Me: Great.  That is wonderful.  Um, and I did interview your administrator.  She seemed very excited about it too.  Have you had any feedback yet, or really it's kind of in the middle.  
  
T: Yeah, not yet and we are gonna do presentations next week and I intend to invite the two administrators to come down anytime during our classes during those two days and-  
  
Me: Are they, do find that your administrators are in classrooms alot or not?  
  
T: They are in the halls a lot, um, you know.  They are visible.  They don't come alot into the classroom. Um, but they are accessible and the kids-that has been a neat thing too because the kids have interviewed our janitor-  
  
Me: Right, yeah.  That is true.  
  
T: They have interviewed, um, our cafeteria ladies.  Um, the head of our food services.  They have interviewed the principals.  They have interviewed, I think somebody has interviewed the assistant principal.  So everybody has been really, really into it.  I even had a group that went over to the high school, you know to get, ask questions about garbage.  
  
Me: Mmmhmmmm.  
  
T: Um, so even people outside of our building have been, you know.  
  
Me: Right.  
  
T: Very open to-I think that shows some leadership skills among the kids because-that is kind of a very scary thing to ask.  That is another thing. It was really, really hard for me.  The first time one of them said, “Can I go interview someone?” I went hhhhhhhh [makes a sound showing she was leery and then laughter].  I can't clear that now.  I haven't cleared the way for you.  And then I was like you know these kids are thirteen, and they are getting to an age where they do need to take some ownership of some of this, and, and I said, “Here is what you should say.  You know, this is what we would like to do.  Is this a good time?  If this isn't a good time, then when can I come back?  Would you like me to, you know, give you a printed copy that you can answer it on paper.”  Which everybody has been pretty much willing to talk to everybody there on the spot?  
  
Me: Good.  
  
T: And um, but it, it's kinda like pushing the baby bird out of the nest.  
  
Me: Right [laughter].  Yeah.  
  
T: I used to teach 6th grade and there is a difference between sixth graders and seventh graders.  
  
Me: Yeah.  
  
T: Especially, this time of year, and um, I would be a lot more protective of my sixth graders and a lot less likely to just turn them loose and let em' go.  [Inaudible]. I would email them first and be like, I am gonna send some student.  Would that be okay?  Um, and if they say no, this isn't a good time then, thank you very much and come back.  
  
Me: Right.  
  
T: It's been.  Everybody has been really, really open, so, um-  
  
Me: Good.  
  
T: So, I think to answer your question.  I haven't had a specific conversation with my principal about it but, um, I am hoping after we do some of the projects next week-  
  
Me: Right. Yeah.  
  
T: She made mention of the fact that we were talking about we were in the middle of projects with my kids.  And she was like, big [emphasis] projects [laughter].  She is aware of it.  
  
Me: Yeah.  Um, do you think, um.  How do you think technology is enhancing the project?  
  
T: Some of it they couldn't do without the technology.  I mean, they could take pictures and we could have them developed.  Um, and really the same with the video, but without the access to the Internet, and access to the laptops that can handle the pictures, and the video and-  
  
Me: Do your other computers have trouble with that much data?  
  
T: Yeah, and, and um.  And, yeah, it, I mean, if I had to do the project without technology, it would be a lot of, it would just be a different project.  They would probably have to sketch or draw pictures.  Which they like to do and they put some [inaudible].  We would probably be a little more locked in to, and I would have to limit what they did.  Like, you can choose from this list of things.  If you have an idea.  Maybe, this has been completely open ended. It would of; it would change the whole project if they didn't have the technology available to them.  
  
Me: Okay.  
  
T: And, and, it would.  I would have really think about that and sit down and kind of list the ways it would.  We could still do it but it would be-  
  
Me: Do you think it would take longer?  
  
T: I think it would take a lot longer to do it.  They’d have to; they’d be doing-instead of PowerPoint.  They would be making posters.  The quality when they do it by hand is not quite the same.    
  
Me: No, mmhmm.  
  
T: They don't take as much care and time with something like that.  And there are, I've got a few kids that are just, don't have the dexterity to do a handmade poster and have it look.  They, they couldn't do it. Or they would be doing reports, which, isn't.  
  
Me: Right.  I noticed that a lot of people talked about a Prezi, Is that something that is taught somewhere elsewhere?  
  
T: They have used it in their computer lab classes.  Um, we used it.  We, we've tried it out this year.  We used it; there were some kids that said something to me about it after they used it in commuter lab.  Can we use Prezi for something else. And I said, “I don't know what that is.”  And that’s very cool.  It is.  There is something with our network. It has to be our network because and frequently they will be cruising right along, they will be their, their, their projects and they will save it and come back the next day and there are error messages and they can't access it.  
  
Me: Oh.  
  
T: Sometimes it's the laptops. They can't get on, but they can get on on a desktop.  
  
  
Me: Mmhmm.  
  
T: Sometimes they can't even get on a desktop.  They go home and they have problems there with it.  And I did talk to the tech director about it because she's the part-time, the assistant, the part-time technology